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PETER OF WAR

GEOFFREY GORDON

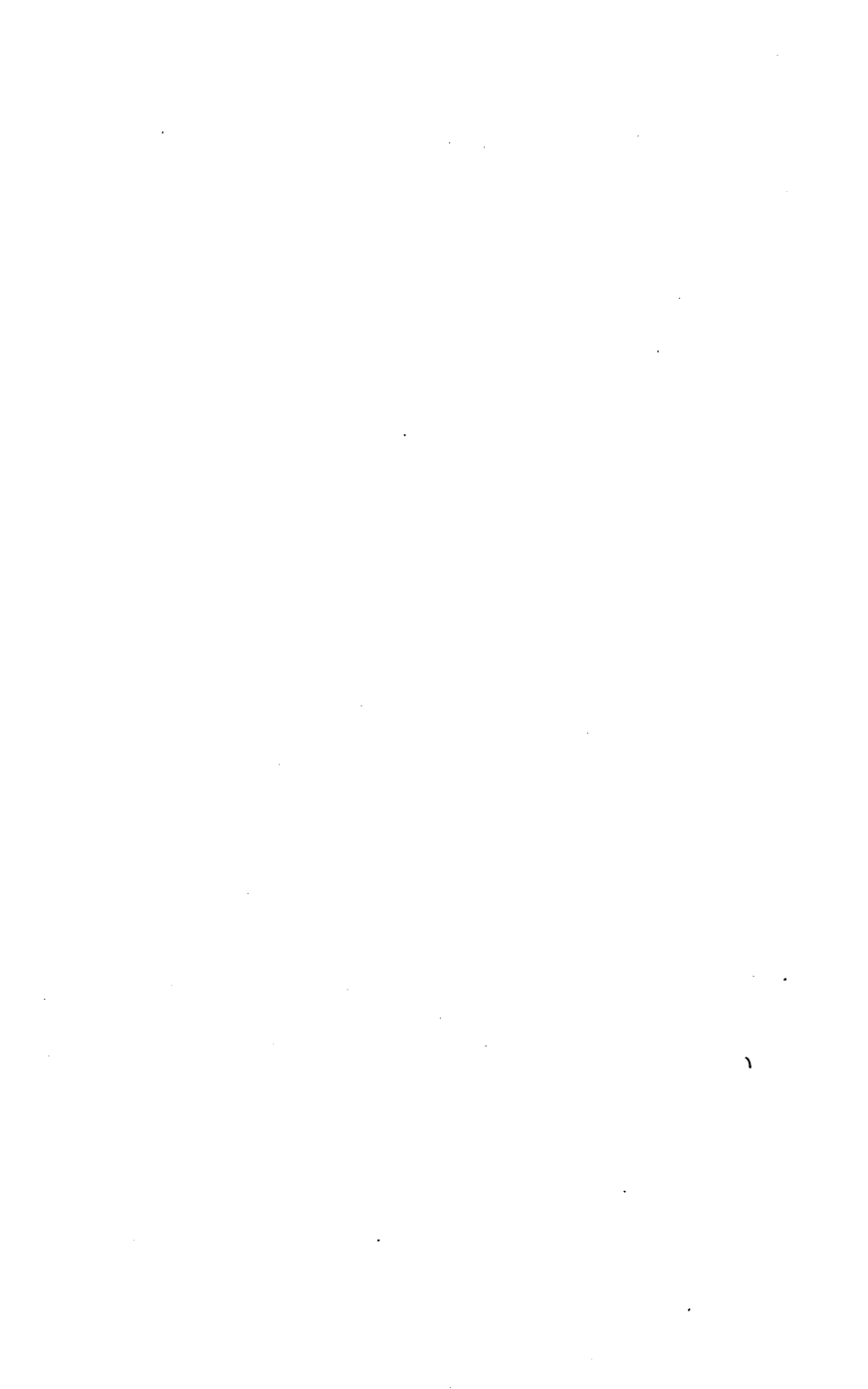
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AN INTERPRETER OF WAR



# AN INTERPRETER OF WAR

HABAKKUK

ADDRESSES DELIVERED IN ST. MARGARET'S,  
WESTMINSTER

BY THE REV.  
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## PREFATORY NOTE

THE following pages are based on a series of Addresses delivered on the Sunday Evenings of August and September 1915, in St. Margaret's, Westminster. They make no pretence of scholarship, but are an attempt to find in the book of Habakkuk lines of thought which may be helpful in this present time of war. There are, of course, critical questions in connection with the Book upon which scholars disagree, but on these I have no qualifications which would entitle me to an opinion. There are, I think, only three such points which in any material degree affect the argument, and in each case I have adopted the explanation which seemed most natural.

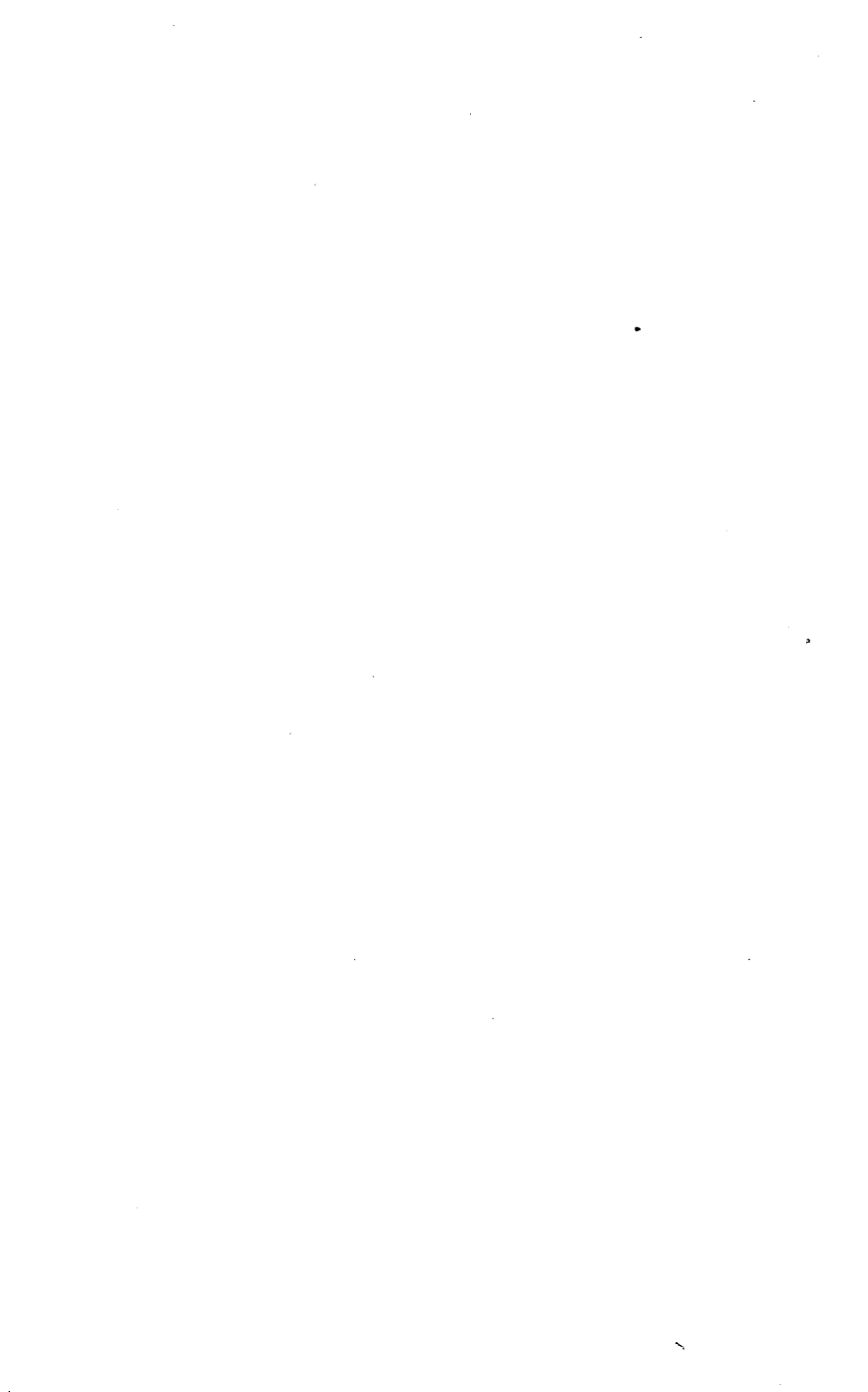
(1) I have tried to take the book as it stands and to avoid any interpretation which would involve a rearrangement of the verses.

(2) I have assumed that the invasion of Judæa was imminent, but that it had not actually taken place.

(3) Following Dr. Driver, I have taken Chapter I, verses 2-4, as referring to internal disorder and not to foreign oppression.

The quotations throughout are from the revised version.

The final revision has not been possible from "somewhere in France." I wish, however, to express my gratitude to the Rev. H. F. Tomkinson and to my wife for their help.



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# AN INTERPRETER OF WAR

## I

### INTRODUCTORY

“ And Moses said unto him, Art thou jealous for my sake? would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them ! ”—Numbers xi. 29.

#### (A) THE CHRISTIAN DUTY OF PROPHECY

IF you were to ask a number of people what in their opinion was the best book on the war, some, perhaps, would select a graphic account of the military operations, thus showing that, to them the strategic and tactical conduct of the war was the topic of outstanding interest. Some, more occupied with causes, would point to one of the many carefully arranged records of the diplomatic correspondence which passed between the courts of Europe in the fateful days at the end of July and the beginning of August 1914. Others, anxious to go further back, would select some historical description of the growth and ambitions of Prussia from the days of Frederick the Great to the present time. Others again, desirous of probing deeper, would choose some book which contained a careful analysis of the moral forces at work among the nations engaged—the pride of Germany, the Slavophilism of Russia, and the apparent slackening of the moral fibre of English life.

Such a list, however, would not exhaust all the possible types of book, because even a careful tracing of the moral growth or decay of nations may leave out the most important factor of all; the factor that is God. To understand the deepest meaning of war, we must try to view it always as it appears to God. "God whose never failing Providence ordereth all things both in heaven and earth;"<sup>1</sup> and so among the great variety of books my own choice falls unhesitatingly upon one which is little known and little read, the book of Habakkuk.

Unfortunately, the Prophetic books are a part of the Bible to which comparatively little attention is paid. Jonah (one of the most remarkable books in all literature, containing, as it does, for the first time a wide vision of God's purposes for all the nations of the world), is disastrously associated in most people's minds solely with the story of the whale. The name of Habakkuk, it is true, has achieved a place in contemporary journalism, but only because of the ridiculous and quite unfair statement of Voltaire, that he was *capable de tout*. The great Isaiah is better known, but he is rarely studied for the sake of his political and religious teaching taken as a whole; his book has become familiar to us because of some isolated passages of outstanding beauty. The ordinary method of reading Isaiah, as some one put it in quite another connection, is suggestive of the starlings who in springtime sit upon the backs of the sheep to pull off loose pieces of wool with which to line their own nests. The reason of this neglect of the Prophets is not difficult to find. They cannot be properly studied, as it were, in the void. They were statesmen, and to understand their teaching some knowledge of the historical circumstances of their time is essential. In the same way any one can quote the speeches of Disraeli

<sup>1</sup> Collect for the first week of the War, the Eighth Sunday after Trinity.

for their epigrams and scintillating passages, but, to understand them properly, it is essential to have some knowledge of the condition of Europe at the time when they were delivered.

In the case of Habakkuk, the knowledge of contemporary history that is required is very slight. The circumstances of his time afford an extraordinarily close parallel with our own, and, as it is my purpose in the ensuing pages to study his book in the light of present events, I hope that such of the historical setting as is relevant will sufficiently emerge. But before considering the book itself and its attitude towards the problem of war, let us first try to see what is the resemblance between Habakkuk and ourselves, between his endowments and our own.

Habakkuk was a Prophet? Now what exactly is a Prophet? It is very difficult to rid our minds of the old magical conception; for the nineteenth century was not less superstitious about the Prophets than the Middle Ages were about the Sacraments. We were taught to think of the Prophets as men who wrote history before it happened, whereas, in fact, prediction played but a small part in their work. Moses was the greatest of the Prophets, and of him no single prediction is recorded. A truer idea can be obtained by considering the various titles by which, in different parts of the Bible, the Prophet is described. He is called "Man of God": he must pre-eminently be a man in close personal relationship with God. He is the "Messenger of Jehovah," the "Servant of Jehovah": and as such, he interprets God's doings to men, both in past history and in contemporary events. He is the "Seer"—this is the oldest title of all; it implies a purely Godward insight, it does not of necessity suggest any duty towards man. It is the archaic, primitive title and gradually gave way before the word which is translated Prophet. The Prophet is he who



speaks forth from God to man. He is a Forthteller rather than a Foreteller; a Preacher rather than a Predictor.

The Prophets, then, were men of insight, in close personal touch with God; His messengers and teachers interpreting Him to men. They spoke forth for God: they were preachers sometimes of personal righteousness, denouncing hypocrisy and formalism; sometimes of social righteousness (no modern orator denounces the oppression of the poor in more vigorous language than does the peasant Prophet Amos, the herdsman of Tekoa); but pre-eminently they were preachers of national righteousness. Isaiah was the right hand, the Prime Minister of Hezekiah, one of the best of Jewish Kings; Jeremiah was the saddened leader of a life-long opposition. But whatever the problem—personal, social, international—the Prophets always dealt with it unswervingly in the light of their knowledge of God. Such was the Prophets' task, forthtellers of the will of God in matters of daily life.

To enable them to fulfil it, to make them true revealers, true guides, they needed a special endowment of the Holy Spirit. Their possession of this gift is acknowledged in our Nicene Creed. "I believe in the Holy Ghost . . . Who spake by the Prophets." We reach, then, this definition of a Prophet: A Prophet is one who is inspired by the Spirit of God to reveal His will and to teach and guide His people.

In Israel they were a special class. Let us look for a moment at the story from which the words of our text are taken: Moses, the man of God, oppressed with the burden of his responsibilities, complains of the greatness of his lonely task. "And Moses said unto the Lord, Wherefore hast thou evil entreated thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in thy sight, that thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? . . .

I am not able to bear all this people alone, because it is too heavy for me.”<sup>1</sup> In answer to this complaint, the Lord bids Moses select seventy of the elders of the people, and promises : “ I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them ; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone.”<sup>2</sup> And then the story goes on to tell how the spirit was conferred upon the seventy and they prophesied. For the coming of this gift, the seventy had been gathered about the Tabernacle, but two of them, Eldad and Medad, remained in the camp, and there they prophesied. Joshua, jealous for his master, urged that they should be restrained ; but Moses himself, so far from entertaining any such feeling, wished only that his gift might be more widely shared. “ And Moses said unto him, Art thou jealous for my sake ? would God that *all* the Lord’s people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them ! ”<sup>3</sup> Are these words of Moses’ merely the expression of a vague impossible hope ? I think not. A later Prophet foresaw a time when this aspiration should be translated into fact. And on the day of Pentecost when men “ were all amazed and were perplexed,” seeking an explanation of the strange happenings which they had witnessed, S. Peter is ready with his answer. The aspiration of Moses, the prediction of Joel, has been in deed and in fact fulfilled. “ This is that which hath been spoken by the Prophet Joel ; And it shall be in the last days, saith God, I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh : And your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, And your young men shall see visions, And your old men shall dream dreams : yea and on my servants and on my handmaidens in those days will I pour forth of my Spirit ; and they shall prophesy.”<sup>4</sup>

The Spirit, which under the old dispensation was

<sup>1</sup> Num. xi. 11, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Num. xi. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Num. xi. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Acts ii. 16-18.

conferred only upon a selected few, is poured out now upon the whole Church. Whitsuntide is the democratization of religion. In the Jewish Church there had been special classes of Priests and Prophets to act as intermediaries between God and man; but the priestly and prophetic line both received their complete fulfilment in Our Lord, the One Mediator. Now the gift which we, as Christians, receive is nothing less than the life of our Lord Himself: in Baptism we are made members of His body; in Confirmation we receive the fulness of His Spirit; at Holy Communion it is on His life that we feed, His life that we draw into ourselves. Our Lord is perfect Priest and perfect Prophet, and if we share His life it follows that the essence of both offices is conferred upon all Christians. By virtue of our membership in His priestly and prophetic body, we are all—potentially at least—priests and prophets. Whitsuntide was the democratization of religion in that its highest functions ceased to be the exclusive property of a caste. Those functions reside henceforth in the whole spirit-bearing body, but the gift of the Spirit to all does not, of course, mean that there is no longer any specialization. Not every member of the Church is equally competent to perform all the Church's functions. Democracy does not involve the absence of leadership, though in other spheres such a conception of what democracy means seems sometimes to be assumed.

In virtue of our membership, we all share, as baptized Christians, in the life of Christ: Christ the Priest; Christ the Prophet. The priestly function is highly specialized in that no unordained person can perform its most characteristic act, the celebration of the Holy Communion, but even here the Priest at the altar does not stand alone. He is the appointed, ordained, executive organ of the body, the mouthpiece of the Church whose priestliness resides in the whole

body. The Christian minister is ordained to a two-fold function, the priestly and the prophetic; of which the highest expressions are respectively the Celebration of the Holy Communion and Preaching. But while the priestly function is highly specialized, the prophetic is less so. In the early Church there seem to have been men, who were in a special sense acknowledged to be Prophets. The Church is founded on the Apostles and Prophets; but the Christian Prophets were never an order comparable to the order of Priests or Deacons. A man was recognized to be a Prophet by reason of his special endowments; his ministry was charismatic. Special gifts impose upon their possessor corresponding obligations. Some have pre-eminently the prophetic gift; upon them therefore is laid a larger measure of prophetic duty. Upon the preacher that duty is laid perforce. For him the methods of the greatest Prophets are obviously deserving of special study. But in virtue of his baptismal gift, every Christian is at least potentially a Prophet, therefore such a study is of value for us all. By his life, if not by his words, every Christian is bound to proclaim the God who dwells within him.

### (B) THE SPECIAL VALUE OF HABAKKUK

All the Prophetic writings well repay our careful attention, and most of the Prophets began to write with their message already certain. Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel describe their calls, but Habakkuk alone tells us of the difficulties and doubts through which he attained his message. In Habakkuk we see a Prophet in the making. His book is in the form of a dialogue between himself and God. It opens with a question—almost a complaint. The lawlessness and disorder of his own people distress and bewilder him.

Verses 5-11 are God's answer, describing the great military people whom He is bringing up against Israel. The remaining verses of the first chapter are the Prophet's passionate protest against the wickedness of such a nation being allowed to prosper even for a time.

The first chapter and the first four verses of Chapter II show us a puzzled questioner gradually becoming the assured Prophet; they record the stages through which he comes to understand.

The remainder of the second chapter is the Prophet's reading of history, in which he begins to see the slow working out of the purposes of God.

The final chapter is the magnificent pæan of an assured faith, which, come what may of disaster and distress, still can say, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."<sup>1</sup>

Such are the lines of thought which the succeeding pages will try to follow out, but at the close of this introductory section the thought which I wish to emphasize is that upon us all, from the very fact that we are Christians—members of the body of the prophetic Christ—there is imposed a measure of prophetic duty. As Christians we have received the gift of the Spirit, the self-same Spirit "who spake through the Prophets," and this gift constitutes for us our prophetic call. To-day the world needs Prophets; men and women who in larger or smaller circles, with their intimate friends and among the many with whom they are brought in contact, will look steadfastly at the things that are happening, in the light of God, and will seek to interpret their inner meaning to their fellows. To help us to discharge this duty a study of any of the great Hebrew Prophets would be valuable. The Book of Habakkuk is of special value, partly because the circumstances of his time were so closely parallel to our own, in that he too had to face the prospect of war

<sup>1</sup> Hab. iii. 18.

with a great military Empire whose characteristics resembled in many respects those of the militarist power with which we are in conflict : partly because in this book, more than in any other, we can trace the steps by which prophetic steadfastness was attained. Here we watch the stages by which a puzzled, bewildered, questioning man became the assured interpreter of God. Here we watch a Prophet in the making.

## II

### THE NEED FOR NATIONAL PENITENCE

"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save. Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and look upon perverseness? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there is strife, and contention riseth up. Therefore the law is slackened, and judgement doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore judgement goeth forth perverted."—Hab. i. 2-4.

IN these words Habakkuk speaks of the sins and failures of his own people. Later, as we shall see, he has some strong things to say about the enemy. Habakkuk was a virile and aggressive patriot, but none the less he is not afraid to face first the faults of his own nation.

In many ways the book reminds us of the balanced arrangement of a Christian service. Our ordinary Church services contain four essentials—Penitence, Praise, Preaching, Prayer. Penitence: in the Confession with which our service opens. Prayer: in the Collects and Intercessions. Preaching: the proclamation of the Truth of God in the Lessons and from the pulpit. Praise: in the Psalms, the anthems and the hymns. All these four are found in the book of Habakkuk. There is penitent acknowledgment of sin. There is prayer for help and for understanding. There is a proclamation of God's ways and of His glory. And the whole closes on the note of Praise. Even in the face of the much greater wickedness of the enemy, Habakkuk is not blind to the faults of his own nation, and he does

not hesitate to acknowledge them. As in our Christian services, penitence comes first: the first four verses are the acknowledgment of national sin, and they show the bewilderment and doubt in which he embarked upon his prophetic task.

I have called Habakkuk a Prophet in the making. Later we shall see that he attains to that certainty which is the characteristic of all the great Prophets. He is able to "forthtell" the truth of God with full assurance; but in these earlier verses he is very far from having attained to this Prophetic certainty.

"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear? I cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save" (i. 2). The book opens with an impatient question, almost a complaint. Thou wilt not hear. Thou wilt not save. O Lord, how long? He is writing at a time of national chaos; and such a beginning indicates that he is himself in a state of unrest, is himself passing through the period of storm and stress. He is puzzled, almost in despair, over the condition of his own country, the wickedness of the people of Judah.

It is worth while to take note of the different words by which he describes it. "Why dost thou shew me iniquity, and look upon perverseness? for spoiling and violence are before me: and there is strife, and contention riseth up" (i. 3). Iniquity, spoiling, violence, strife, contention. This piling up of words, six different words in one verse, shows, I think, that the shame of it all was pressing heavily upon his heart and conscience. The words in this verse have not of necessity any religious significance. They are terms which could be used by a writer who did not believe in God at all, but even here Habakkuk begins to look Godward. "Why dost *thou* shew me iniquity?" Already he looks towards God though, as yet, it is not to seek from Him his answer, but only, as it were, to affix responsibility. "Why dost thou shew me?" This desire to make God



responsible for human iniquity is a very common attitude of mind among those who to-day are puzzled and bewildered. Truly at this stage Habakkuk is very far from being a Prophet. He stands forth to complain. "O Lord, how long?" He stands forth as God's critic. "Why dost thou shew me iniquity?"

Iniquity and perverseness are alike the fruit of force and self-assertiveness. Spoiling, violence, strife and contention are everywhere apparent. Unbrotherliness, the assertion of the individual at the expense of the community, the oppression of the weak by the strong, of the poor by the rich; these are leading themes of nearly all the Prophets.

The fourth verse is a further step towards viewing the problem in the light of God. "Therefore the law is slacked, and judgement doth never go forth: for the wicked doth compass about the righteous; therefore judgement goeth forth perverted" (i. 4). As the result of chaos and national disorder the Law is slacked. The word means "The Divine Law." Even in his bewilderment and almost despair Habakkuk does not forget that over and above the disorder of humanity there is a divine order, a law of God. The Divine Law exists, but so great is the pressure of human lawlessness that its ministers are paralysed, "their judgement goeth forth perverted." It is a plea for leadership from the representatives of the Divine Law, the Priests of the Lord. Habakkuk sees everywhere the reign of force instead of law; he sees human iniquity and human violence perverting the law of God. It is for the solution of this disorder that he asks. "O Lord, how long?" He does not doubt the existence of God's Law; but in Judah, at the moment, it seems to him that God's Law does not run. He is a questioner, but not a godless questioner.

Our subject is Habakkuk and war. In the verses which we have been considering his thoughts are concerned only with his own people; so far there has been

no mention at all of any foreign power. Nevertheless, a consideration of this section is altogether germane to our actual subject. Habakkuk would never have become a true interpreter of the inner meaning of the war which was imminent unless first he had considered the condition of his own people. Internal and international, home and foreign affairs cannot in practice be separated from one another. Even on the material plane, a statesman who conducted foreign policy without considering the internal resources of his country would be but a poor director of the national destiny. That is not less true on the moral plane: we cannot possibly understand the foreign policy of a nation unless we know something of the moral characteristics of its people. Still less can we enter into the deeper meanings, the inner moral causes which work themselves out in external strength or weakness, unless we face first the problems of national character.

Later on, when we come to consider the description of the power of the Chaldaean enemies of Israel, it will be time enough to consider the character of our own enemies, what it is that we ourselves have to fight. Let us begin, as Habakkuk did, with the home difficulty, and then we shall be in a better position to understand the international problem. Habakkuk, who, as we shall see, yielded to none in the vigour of his denunciation of the enemy, had the courage first to face the faults of his own people. Herein he showed the characteristic of a true Prophet. You will find in the Old Testament frequent mention of a class of teachers who are described as the "False Prophets." They were often men of high positions. They were not always or necessarily false in the sense of fraudulent. The essential distinction between the true Prophet and the false was that while the former were leaders, the latter were but echoes of public opinion. The true Prophets steadfastly upheld the religious view of

national affairs quite regardless of popularity, the false gave utterance only to things which they thought would be acceptable. When Ahab was king in Israel, four hundred false prophets were eager to approve his policy.<sup>1</sup> Such men are always to be found in abundance near a throne. To-day, in a democratic country like our own, it is to the sovereign people that they pay their court. Then it was in the royal palace that they prophesied, now it is in the cheap magazine and in the halfpenny press. But their characteristics remain unchanged. They are still echoes, not leaders, anxious only to insist upon truths which they believe will be palatable.

If, like the true Prophets of Israel, we want to be helpful interpreters of the ways of God, we too must face our faults first. It may not be acceptable. Denunciation of the enemy will certainly be more popular. But, like Micaiah, the son of Imlah, the religious-minded man will be uninfluenced by considerations such as these. He will realize always the prior need; and, however certain he may be of the wickedness of the enemy and of the righteousness of the national cause, he will not therefore be unmindful of the need of national penitence.

It will not be necessary to go through these verses again word by word, but it will, I think, be agreed that the outstanding impression which we retained from Habakkuk's analysis of the condition of his own people was one of lawlessness. Precisely this same thing—lawlessness—was to many observers the most disquieting symptom in England before the war. You saw this lawlessness everywhere, in all ranks and in all classes of society. The growth of luxury among the rich, what was it but the disregard of responsibilities, the weakening of the sense of obligation? In the world of Labour the fruits of the earlier Trades Union move-

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings xxii.

ment were in danger of being lost through the undisciplined disregard of agreements by a large section of the younger men. In politics, whatever may be urged against the old two-party system, it was orderly as compared with the more recent fortuitous concourse of groups bound together by no ascertainable principle. Or again, the Woman's movement and the proceedings in Ulster, whatever their merits or their excuse, alike indicated a very marked decay of respect for Law.

Such reflections have turned our thoughts to events which, though recent according to the scale of measured time, belong to the remote half-forgotten days "Before the War." The disorder and lawlessness of those times, though now remedied in part, should move us to national humility, as similar conditions affected Habakkuk twenty-five centuries ago. But what is it that we mean when we talk of national humility and national penitence? In smaller circles corporate shame and pride are easy to understand. If one member of a family achieves distinction or is disgraced, the whole household feels itself accordingly elated or besmirched, so strong in that restricted circle is the corporate feeling, the sense of unity and of a common membership. But this sense of unity, and, in consequence, the possibility of corporate feeling, weakens with each extension of the circumference; school *esprit de corps* is a real power, and only less strong than family solidarity; civic pride, while it is an effective force in provincial towns, is almost impossible to create in a city so vast as London. So is it in the case of the nation. National pride or national penitence is a possibility just so far as we can realize our membership, our oneness in the bond of common nationality.

To us in our day, the call to national penitence has come as it came to the Jews in the time of Habakkuk. To-day a great sermon on the need for penitence is being preached to the nations—and it is being preached, not

by man, but by God Himself, and the most that His ministers can do is to comment very humbly on some small part of His terrific message. We have been moved, I think, to some degree of real penitence, but it is so much easier to see our neighbours' faults than to acknowledge our own; so much more congenial to be critical than to be penitent. We have perhaps become aware of some beams in our own eyes, but often we are too energetically occupied in pointing to the motes that are in our neighbours' eyes. The vicarious penitence of which we have seen so much of late is uncomfortably reminiscent of the Diamond Jubilee, when people took advantage of the national rejoicings to push their pet particular project—a library, a drinking fountain, or a new wing for some favourite building. To-day, people are using the national chastening to criticize more vigorously than before the faults to which they have always most objected. If we are properly to repent of national sins, our penitence must begin nearer home. As a Church, we have but little right to complain of national lawlessness unless we are genuinely penitent for the disorder and the lack of fellowship within the Church herself. As members of the Church, we are unreasonable in criticizing her failure to rise to her opportunities unless so far as in us lies we are, each and all, bestirring ourselves to make her work and her witness more effective in the world. As individuals, we cannot repent of the faults of the nation and of the Church unless we are sincerely striving to better our own individual lives.

“Pride cometh before a fall” is a copy-book maxim, but it applies to nations as well as to children, and its complementary truth is that penitent humility is the essential condition precedent to our receiving God's support and so to our ultimate success. The common journalistic assumption that acknowledgment of national sin is unpatriotic and pro-German, is an insidious form

of pride against which as Christians we are bound to protest. Self-criticism does not involve our approval of the foe. Penitence towards God carries with it no weakening towards the enemy. It is our boast that we went into the war with clean hands. That is our boast, and I, for one, from my heart believe it justified. As far as provocation and the immediate causes of the war are concerned, the published evidence makes it clear that the British foreign minister and the British nation are free from guilt. That is our verdict, and we believe that it will be the verdict of posterity. But we must not therefore become self-righteous. As a nation we have strayed far from God's ways, we have turned aside from the Divine Order. God made the world: and when we remember that in God's own world international affairs are conducted without any reference to God at all, that social relations are organized with but little reference to His will, and that our own individual lives are very far from attaining to His standard, we shall begin to feel our need of Penitence.

"Earth hath forsaken Thy ways of Blessedness,  
Slighted Thy Word."

It implies no under-estimation of the guilt of Germany to believe that our sins may have been part of the world's burden of sin which in the sight of God made necessary the purgation of war. Most certainly our slackness and our shortcomings are a large part of the cause of its long duration and its augmented suffering.

Habakkuk, as we shall see, was convinced of the glorious destiny of the Jewish people; he denounced the infamies and atrocities of the Chaldæan armies; but none the less he approached his prophetic task very humbly, in deep penitence and with a burning consciousness of the sins of his own nation. These verses (2-4) show us the first stage of his journey from bewilderment to certainty, from anxious questioning to prophetic

steadfastness. In them we see that he faced first the sins and shortcomings of his own people. If, like him, we are to emerge from our perplexities, and to become true Prophets, true interpreters of the ways of God, let us take from him this warning. We must allow neither the righteousness of our cause, nor the wickedness of our enemies, to blind us to our own faults, nor to make us unmindful of the need of national penitence.

We believe that God has called us to His Service, but our prayers in this time of war must include confession and a plea for forgiveness, that we may be worthy of our calling. God does not change. He will help us if we place and keep ourselves on His side. He will not, cannot help unless in penitence we are ranging ourselves in line with Him, unless, very humbly, we are trying to do His will. God does not change. It is we who have to take sides, not God.

### III

## AN ANALYSIS OF MILITARISM

"He sacrificeth unto his net and burneth incense unto his own drag."—Hab. i. 16.

IN the previous address we were facing our own faults and the need for national penitence. Leaving now this uncongenial but necessary topic, we can go on to consider the main part of the first chapter. It contains a searching analysis of the nature of militarism. Before, however, we examine it in detail there are two points on which it seems desirable very briefly to touch.

Notice first the construction of the chapter. Verses 2-4 are Habakkuk's question which we have just been considering. Verses 5-11 contain God's answer, that He is going to bring up the Chaldæan nation against Judah. In verses 12-17 it is again Habakkuk himself who speaks—this time in passionate protest. The possibility that the All-Holy God should use for His purposes such a nation as the Chaldæans, raises a real moral problem, and Habakkuk's way of facing it is perhaps the most interesting and valuable part of the book, but I propose to consider it in the next address and here to deal only with those parts of the chapter which are a description of militarism. At this stage, also, perhaps the statement of one or two historical facts may help to make the situation clear. The book was written about the year 600 B.C. For many years before this date the two great powers had been the Empires of Egypt and of Assyria, but the latter had for some time been growing



weaker. When Habakkuk wrote, Judah was under the comparatively mild suzerainty of Egypt, but already in the north-east a new power was arising. The Chaldæans of Babylon were gradually absorbing what had been the Empire of Assyria. In 607 B.C., seven years before the book was written, Nineveh, the old Assyrian capital, had fallen before them, and though the Jews had not yet themselves suffered the horrors of a Chaldæan invasion, they had already begun to hear disquieting rumours of their prowess and of their cruelty to other nations.

With these preliminaries let us turn again to the actual book. Habakkuk has described the lawless condition of his own people and has asked how God is going to deal with them. Verses 5-11 contain God's answer to his question, but Habakkuk's conviction of it does not come to him, as it were, by some magical dictation, by the word of the mouth of some oracle, but as the result of patient, prayerful, Godward study. Inspired by the Spirit of God, he looks facts in the face. He sees what is going on in the world around him. "Behold ye among the nations" (i. 5). He sees that other peoples are falling before the Chaldæans, and it is borne in upon him that a similar fate is in store for lawless, undisciplined Judah. He sees the truth, the imminent danger, and is sufficiently sincere with himself to realize what it involves. He recognizes it himself, but it is an unpalatable truth and he knows that the people will not believe it. "I work a work in your days which ye will not believe though it be told you."

In the verses that follow, Habakkuk goes on to describe the characteristics of Chaldæan militarism. They will not need much comment, for they almost explain themselves. But as we read them, let us remember that it is useless to consider enemy characteristics in the state of mind of him who thanked God that he was not as other men are. Let us rather study

them with the definite objects of learning from them anything there may be of good, and of guarding against similar evils in ourselves; so, understanding better the nature of that which we have to resist, we shall be the better prepared. Would to God that, as a nation, we had listened more to those who, like Habakkuk, warned us beforehand of the coming danger. Let us at least now try to understand its nature and its magnitude.

"For, lo, I raise up the Chaldæans, that bitter and hasty nation" (i. 6). The real militarist is not concerned to spread sweetness and light. He is bitter, harsh, cruel, and headstrong, "which march through the breadth of the earth to possess dwelling places that are not theirs." The desire of possession, the lust of conquest, takes no thought for the rights of others. What to it are other peoples' homes or guaranteed rights? What but scraps of paper?

In the next few verses there is in our versions an important mistranslation. The verbs are all singular, and so for "they" we should read "he" or "it." And this is really suggestive. It is the good side of an otherwise evil thing, for militarism seems to be able, in the most extraordinary way, to unite a nation and to combine it into a single whole. While the verses describing Judah give us a picture of division and disorder, the Chaldæans are so united that Habakkuk speaks of them in the singular. "He is terrible. . . ." "His horses . . ." and so on. The nation has but a single will and moves to a single aim. Even so, little more than a century ago the French nation, imbued with the military ideal of Napoleon, moved as one man to its short-lived triumph. And so to-day, Germany, with all her faults, can teach divided disorganized England great lessons of the subordination of the individual will to national ends.

"Their judgement and their dignity proceed from themselves" (i. 7). Here we have a characteristic of

the militarist nation which is fundamental and unchanging. Its judgment and its dignity proceed from itself. It is a sentence which might be paralleled over and over again from the writings of Treitschke and Bernhardi. These and other apologists of modern militarism always seemed to regard the State as an end in itself, a thing of final, ultimate value and authority. "The State is the highest thing in the eternal society of man; above it there is nothing at all in the history of man." This conception of the state is the formulated creed of the militarist, but there are elements of it in all merely national policies. The claims of the state must, of course, be paramount over purely private interests. We in England must learn far better than we have yet done to subordinate individual to national claims. But even the state is not an end in itself, the interests of the nation-state are not supreme interests. There will never be an end of wars till such a conception of the state is destroyed, till men learn to seek for the solution of political problems not merely on the lines of national self-interest, but in accordance with the best interests of Europe and of the world as a whole. Hague Courts, international arbitration, Concerts of Europe are all steps in that direction. But there can be no guarantee of a final or a lasting peace, till our sense of oneness, of common membership, has extended beyond the confines of the national state to the widest possible unity in our common loyalty to the law of the Universal, the Eternal Christ, the one God of all the earth, overriding "the judgement and dignity" of our own particular unit.

"Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves. . . . They come all of them for violence, their faces are set eagerly as the east wind; and they gather captives as the sand" (i. 8, 9). Such a nation, relying on force, is sure to be well equipped with arms and munitions. Substitute great

guns for strong horses, and these verses become an accurate description of the German advance in 1870 and 1914.

"Yea, he scoffeth at kings, and princes are a derision unto him" (i. 10). The kings and princes of the little tribes of Syria were a derision; their resistance to the military might of Babylon seemed so futile. Such a description makes us think of the barbarian princes in a Roman triumph or of the military Emperor of the French with his court of subject kings. Their resistance seemed futile enough, but when we come to Habakkuk's gospel of hope, we shall remind ourselves that in these little states, which seemed so ridiculous, a derision to their conquerors, there was more of the real principle of permanence than in the great military power which for a time swept over them.

"He derideth every strong hold; for he heapeth up dust, and taketh it." Like Liége, Namur, Kovno, Georgevitz, they fall before the fury of his assault. "Then shall he sweep by as a wind, and shall pass over and be guilty: even he whose might is his god" (i. 11). The worship of power does lead, for a time at any rate, to efficiency and strength. He shall sweep by as a wind. But it leads also to unutterable crimes. He shall be guilty. (It should be noticed that the translation of this eleventh verse is obscure, the Authorized version gives a different sense.)

The next three verses I wish to leave on one side, till we come to consider the moral problem that is raised by the successes of the militarists. In them we will notice here one sentence only, "the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he." As we saw last week, Habakkuk is not chauvinistically self-satisfied, for he sees and admits the faults of his own nation. For the most part he studiously avoids comparisons. To compare oneself with other people instead of contemplating the one divine standard is the root

of all that is most evil in Pharisaism. But in this, the only place where such a comparison is admitted, he does not hesitate to declare that his own people are more righteous than the Chaldæans. His criticism of his own nation by no means involves approval of the enemy, though that is a truth which journalists are always slow to learn.

There are still three verses in this chapter descriptive of militarism which should be considered in this place. "He taketh up all of them with the angle, he catcheth them in his net, and gathereth them in his drag" (i. 15). There is a change in the metaphor. The instruments of Chaldæan power are now described as the angle, the net, the drag, with which he ensnares his enemies as the fisherman secures his prey. The metaphor is changed, but the meaning remains the same, except perhaps that it brings out more strongly the floundering helplessness of Judah in the toils of the mighty angler. The mere fact of conquest, the exercise of power, is the militarist's delight, "therefore he rejoiceth and is glad."

"Therefore he sacrificeth unto his net, and burneth incense unto his drag" (i. 16). Just as the merely commercially-minded man makes a god of his wealth, as the slothful sacrifices everything to his comfort, as the vain cares only for his reputation with men, so the militarist "sacrificeth unto his net." His might is his god. He deifies the instruments of his power. And for the same reason, because it is through them that he gets what most he values; "because by them his portion is fat, and his meat plenteous."

"Shall he therefore empty his net, and not spare to slay the nations continually?" (i. 17). In this last verse the troubled questioner is heard again. As the chapter opens with the impatient question, How long? so it concludes. Shall not these things have an end? Is one catch of fish to be but the preliminary to emptying the net for another cast? Is the militarist's career of

slaughter to continue for ever? How long, O Lord, how long?

As Christians, members of the body of the Prophetic Christ, we want to be true Prophets, true interpreters of the ways of God. From the previous section it was not difficult to extract for our guidance one clear warning. We must let neither the righteousness of our cause, nor the wickedness of the enemy, blind us to our own faults, to the need for national penitence. But while every verse of Habakkuk's analysis of militarism is suggestive, it is not so easy to draw out from it a clear and definite line of thought for our present need. Two points, however, seem to emerge and to require special emphasis.

First, Habakkuk does not minimize the danger. He sees that a nation "whose might is his God," who had deified his weapons, who "sacrificeth unto his net" is bound to be efficient; is certain to inflict "bitter" harm upon others; will have, inevitably, great success. "He scoffeth at kings . . . he derideth every strong hold. . . . Then shall he sweep by as a wind." Habakkuk sees and properly appraises the strength which comes from the enemy's entire subordination of individual to national interests. Union is strength, even though the union be for evil purposes. The true Prophet does not underestimate his foes. I think that Habakkuk would almost certainly have been censored by our British Press Bureau. Had he been on the staff of those of our newspapers which delight in headlines and posters that tell of delusive victories, I am sure that he would have been instantly dismissed. His voice was as the voice of Jeremiah, who prophesied when the danger which Habakkuk foresaw was imminent, and who continued a faithful but unpopular ministry after the blow had fallen. Jeremiah too insisted that the people must face the fulness of the danger.<sup>1</sup> "Behold, I am

<sup>1</sup> Jer. xxiii. 31-32.

against the prophets, saith the Lord, that smooth<sup>1</sup> their tongues . . . that prophesy lying dreams . . . and cause my people to err by their lies, and vain boasting: yet I sent them not, nor commanded them; neither shall they profit this people at all, saith the Lord." Habakkuk and Jeremiah, the true messengers of God, unlike the self-sent prophets, would not smooth their tongues. They would not proclaim victory where there was no victory, peace where no peace was. Jeremiah, in the misery of his loneliness, sank sometimes to despair, but, as we shall see later, Habakkuk was never a pessimist. He was always confident of ultimate success. Because of his knowledge of God, because God is what He has revealed Himself to be, therefore he knew that not for always would the wicked be allowed to swallow up the man that is more righteous than he.

Isaiah, a hundred years before, had had to rebuke a people unwilling to make sufficient effort for themselves, a people who relied overmuch on an alliance with Egypt, who, like a steam-roller, should come up and crush the enemies of Israel. Habakkuk, following Isaiah, looks for no such easy removal of the danger. It is real and formidable, and his own people must face it resolutely themselves. So, to-day, he who would become a true Prophet, a true interpreter of God, though he will be no pessimist, must face the danger open-eyed, refusing either to minimize or to ignore it.

The other point that seems deserving of special emphasis is that he who would be a true Prophet must never be content with superficial explanations. He will try to get down to the root of things. In the presence of this world tragedy he will try to understand what is the false principle which is its underlying cause. In the last section we saw that part of the indirect cause may have to be found in our own weakness and folly,

<sup>1</sup> See margin.

but I think that Habakkuk gets to the deepest, most fundamental cause when he says of the militarist nation that its judgment and dignity proceeds from itself. The habit of mind, which regards the state as an end in itself, and so, refusing to recognize any obligation beyond its borders, owes no further allegiance to man or God, is, to-day, characteristically German, characteristically, but not exclusively. This particularist habit of mind is the fundamental cause of the disaster, and we can never hope to drive the spirit of war from the world till men come to recognize that the supreme object is not the interest of the individual nor of any particular unit, but the interest of the whole; till they pray and work in union for the coming of the Kingdom of the One God of all the earth.



## IV

### THE QUESTIONING SPIRIT

"Art not thou from everlasting, O Lord my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O Lord, thou hast ordained him for judgement; and thou, O Rock, hast established him for correction. Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look on perverseness, wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he?"—Hab. i. 12, 13.

WE are watching a Prophet in the making. We are tracing the steps by which a bewildered man became the steadfast interpreter of God's ways, the revealer of His will. He has already asked one question and received his answer. Verses 5-11, which describe the victorious career of the Chaldeans, are God's answer to Habakkuk's question about the lawlessness and perverseness of Judah; but the answer has raised a new problem, a problem which is greater even than the original difficulty. How is it possible that the All Holy can tolerate such a people as the Chaldeans? How is it possible that He can employ such tainted instruments for His purposes? If He is using them at all, surely it must be for judgment and correction, not to exterminate His own people, the chosen nation! But how can the All Just, allow, even for a time, such an injustice as the apparent triumph of Babylon, whereby "The wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he"?

These verses are the impassioned cry of one who is himself bewildered; of one who questions the moral

government of the universe; a very critic of God. Certainly the man who utters them is, as yet, far from being a Prophet, far from being able to help others to understand the ways of God. We shall see later what wrought the change, how he found the answer to his questionings and became the assured, steadfast, unmovable messenger of the Lord. But first, how was it that he asked the question at all? How was it that the moral problem, the speculative difficulty, came thus to press upon his conscience? In early Jewish literature the element of speculation is almost entirely absent. Indeed, a recent writer on the growth of Greek and Hebrew religion summarized his argument in the title which he gave his book—"Discovery and Revelation."<sup>1</sup> The Greek advanced along the lines of thought and speculation, and thus came to discover much of the deepest truth; the Hebrew was, for the most part, content to wait passively for the coming of revelation. Speculation was not according to the natural genius of the Jewish people; but if it is entirely absent in the earlier writers, some traces of it begin to become apparent in the opening years of the sixth century B.C. The book of Habakkuk may be said to be the beginning of speculation in Israel. Job, the most questioning, conjectural book in the Old Testament, is usually assigned by scholars to about the same date. (In passing it is worth noting that Job the questioner is not himself a Jew.) Jeremiah, most of whose writings are only a little later, has occasional outbursts of speculation wrung from him by the misery of his personal misfortunes. Ezekiel, twenty years later, tells us that the exiles in Babylon complain that "the ways of the Lord are not equal." The uniqueness of Habakkuk lies in this, that it was he who first felt the speculative difficulty; and that he, alone of the Prophets, centres his whole book in the moral

<sup>1</sup> The title given to the popular edition of H. F. Hamilton's great book, *The People of God*.

problem of God's government of the world, and devotes his energies to the search for a solution. The Jews were by nature an unspeculative race, but by the end of the seventh century B.C. the questioning spirit was beginning to stir. Whence came it and how did it arise? To answer that question it will be necessary to go back a little into the history of the Jewish people and to trace very briefly the religious and political antecedents, the conditions which helped to produce this more speculative type of prophecy.

First, on the religious side: the closing years of the eighth century had witnessed a tremendous spiritual advance. It was the golden age of prophecy; the century of Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah. Those great Prophets had immensely deepened and enlarged men's knowledge of God, and their writings had had profound influence on the best minds of the Jewish nation. Habakkuk especially is of the school of Isaiah; he is steeped in the teaching of his master; his thought and his language alike show constant traces of the influence of the greatest of the Prophets, who had closed his long and glorious ministry ninety years before Habakkuk began his work. Though the main influence upon Habakkuk and his contemporaries was undoubtedly that of the great eighth-century Prophets, we must not underrate the importance of the religious reforms under Josiah, the best of Jewish Kings. The story is a little obscure,<sup>1</sup> but it seems that in the year 621 B.C. there was discovered in the archives of the Temple "A Book of the Law." On the basis of this newly found book, Josiah carried out a drastic reformation, sweeping away many abuses, and instituting or re-establishing the customs therein prescribed. The "Book of the Law" thus discovered and put into circulation was Deuteronomy, the most deeply spiritual of all the Law Books. It was the book on which Our Lord Himself loved to

<sup>1</sup> See 2 Kings xxii, xxiii; 2 Chron. xxiv, xxv.

meditate and from which he frequently quoted. For example, all the three answers to the Tempter in the Wilderness are quotations from this book, and from it he replied to the question about the first and greatest Commandment.<sup>1</sup>

Behind Habakkuk stands the line of the great eighth-century Prophets and the Deuteronomist reformers. All of them represent marked movements in the direction of a higher faith and a more spiritual conception of God.

Such were his antecedents on the religious side; on the political, they can be very briefly stated. The ideas of the great Prophets, though they had strongly influenced the deeper minds in the nation, had had but little effect upon the people as a whole. The long reign of Manasseh,<sup>2</sup> the son of Hezekiah, 696 to 640, is always referred to by later writers as the most corrupt period of Jewish history. The reformation of Josiah, Manasseh's grandson, did something to check the degradation, but Habakkuk's description of the lawlessness and perverseness of Judah, written only twenty years later, shows that its effect upon the masses of the people can have been but slight and short-lived. At home, the nation was decadent. Abroad, the menace from Assyria, so real in Isaiah's day, had become less, as the strength of Assyria had dwindled before the rising power of Babylon (its sometime vassal), and this new power was hardly yet realized to be a danger. In 608 B.C. there befell one of the great tragedies of history. Josiah the Good, the reforming King, was defeated and slain at the Battle of Megiddo by the Egyptian Pharaoh.

These historical details are, I think, not unimportant, for they supply the antecedents, religious and political, which combined to produce in Habakkuk the questioning mind. He had attained to a very high conception of God, and it always happens that, the higher the faith in God, the greater the difficulty that is presented by

<sup>1</sup> Deut. viii. 3; vi. 16; x. 30; vi. 4, 5.

<sup>2</sup> 2 Kings xxi.

the vicissitudes of human experience. For instance, one who thinks little of God can live happy and undisturbed, so long as misfortune does not come to himself personally; he will not concern himself much with the world's load of misery and sin. But from the moment that his heart is really possessed by Christ, however personally prosperous he may be, he will be troubled by the thought of others' pain; and the higher and deeper his own faith, the more the anomalies and inequalities of life will press upon his mind and conscience. So it was with Habakkuk. His high conception of God, as the All Just, the All Holy, the All Pure, was precisely that which made the facts of life so hard to understand; and the facts themselves seemed so cruel. The work of the Prophets, above all of his great master, seemed to have had so little effect; the one righteous King had been overwhelmed by unutterable disaster, and with his defeat the whole prophetic and reforming party seemed to be discredited. It is not, then, a matter for surprise that he should have become a questioner, almost a critic of God's government of the world; nor strange that, when it began to seem probable that the future lay with the most brutal power that had yet appeared, the military Empire of Babylon, he should break out in open protest, in passionate revolt against such an ordering of the universe. "Thou that art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and that canst not look on perverseness, wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up the man that is more righteous than he?" (i. 13).

I have already pointed out that the book of Habakkuk is for us particularly valuable to study, because the circumstances in which he wrote so closely resemble our own. That resemblance is by no means confined to the fact, that like ourselves he had to face the prospect of a war with a great military nation, a power

whose characteristics were so strikingly similar to those of our own enemies. We can also trace some suggestive parallels between our antecedents and those of Habakkuk.

Like him, we in England are the heirs of a very remarkable period. The great evangelical revival at the end of the eighteenth century, the movement of which John Wesley was the Prophet, attained a quite unique moral grip upon the people of England. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the Oxford Movement, through which Keble, Newman, Pusey and their followers gave us a new understanding of the Church as the Body of the Spirit of Christ. Just as the work of Isaiah and others influenced Habakkuk, Jeremiah and Ezekiel a century later, so these two great movements<sup>1</sup> have immensely deepened and strengthened our conception of God. The inevitable growth of materialism, consequent upon the industrial progress of the age, and the tragic and unnecessary conflict with the scientific discoverers of the second half of the century have robbed these spiritual forces of the far-reaching results for which men hoped, yet, in spite of everything, their effect has been deep and lasting.

The snobbish, respectable religion of the eighteenth century, the religion of reserved pews and of patronizing charity is not indeed dead, but it can never again be quite so satisfied, quite so sleek, since the days when the moral earnestness of Wesley made men conscious of the urgent, insistent, peremptory demands of the spiritual life. Again, the irreverent ugliness of Georgian religion grows increasingly intolerable by reason of the sacramental teaching of the Tractarians,

<sup>1</sup> I do not wish to underestimate the perhaps profounder formative influence of religious teachers such as Maurice or Westcott. The Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement are selected not with any idea of excluding other lines of advance, but because of the conspicuousness of their influence upon religious faith and practice.

while to introduce a little beauty, light and colour into our worship no longer makes us suspect of being in connivance with the Pope. Our conception of God has received from these Prophets of the past an immense moral and spiritual uplifting; and if the social condition of the masses of the people seems, in some ways, but little better, it is at least true and hopeful that such a fact presses more heavily on the religious conscience of England. Poverty and injustice, iniquity and violence, still continue as in the days of Habakkuk; but a vast amount of energy is being expended to combat them, through institutions, missions, settlements and personal service. These efforts may not in every case be wisely directed, nor always liberally supported, but at least we no longer accept abuses so complacently as they of the eighteenth century with the comfortable reflection that we have the poor always with us.

Our task, the duty which is upon us as members of the prophetic body of Christ, is the same as Habakkuk's, to be, to our generation, true Prophets, true interpreters of the ways of God in the presence of the great tragedy of war. In the last three addresses we have been tracing the stages by which Habakkuk became a Prophet. To understand them is of real importance to us now, because they are the stages along which we too must travel if we are to fulfil our own prophetic task. The opening verse of the second chapter will show us that it was, alone, upon his watch-tower, in prayerful communion with God, that Habakkuk sought and found the solution of his difficulties; but the outburst of bewildered protest which affords the text for this address seems of itself to carry us along this further stage. It shows us that we must not be too easily content blindly to accept the anomalies and apparent injustices of the world; that, even at the risk of temporary unsettlement, we must, bravely and without flinching, face all the hard facts of life if

we are to wrest from them their inner meaning. To refuse to do so, as some, in the supposed interests of religious faith advise us, is disloyalty to truth, and so cannot be loyalty to religion and to God.

From the teaching in the last century of Wesley, Keble, and other great Prophets of Christ we have gained a deeper faith and have advanced to a higher conception of God. Thus prepared, we are charged to-day to try to understand the bewildering tragedy of war and to interpret its meaning in the light of our attained knowledge. We must not shirk the difficulties. We must be bold questioners; and then in humble prayer we shall learn to understand, and, understanding, shall be able to help our fellow men.



## V

### HOW THE ANSWER CAME

"I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what he will speak with me."—Hab. ii. 1.

WE want to understand. We want to be able to interpret the true meaning of all that is happening, the tremendous events in the midst of which we live. To that end we are studying the steps by which Habakkuk came to understand. In the last address we saw how the questioning spirit stirred within him. It is my purpose now to consider the temper in which he sought his answer.

The puzzled, tired brain has wrestled long with a problem that is too hard for it. Habakkuk's questioning mind is baffled and beaten by the facts of an uneven world. What can he do? How can he find his answer? "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth to see what he will speak with me." He will take up the watching, listening attitude. "Commune with your own heart . . . and be still."<sup>1</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God."<sup>2</sup> Even so, the Psalmist wrestled with another problem about the justice of God's ways. "Then thought I to understand this : but it was too hard for me, Until I went into the sanctuary of God : then understood I."<sup>3</sup> As Psalmist and Prophet found, in the attitude of prayer, that many things, otherwise baffling, became plain, so

<sup>1</sup> Ps. iv. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xlv. 10.

<sup>3</sup> Ps. lxxiii, 15, 16 (P.B.V.).

countless simple people since have found, in the presence of God, new understanding and new light. "In thy light shall we see light."<sup>1</sup> He is the light to lighten our paths. He does not make all things clear. Not till we come to the fulness of His presence; not till the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together; not till then shall it be fulfilled that "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain."<sup>2</sup> Those who seek from religion a rounded, complete answer to all the puzzles and difficulties of life are doomed to inevitable disappointment. A priestly or prophetic claim to omniscience, a casuistry which with mathematical accuracy supplies clear-cut answers to every moral problem which arises, may, for a time, impress the ignorant, the half-educated and the spiritually idle, but assuredly it is not according to the teaching of Him who ordered that a man should love the Lord his God, not only with all his soul and all his heart, but also with all his mind. God does answer prayer. He does guide and help us. But even in His presence and after earnest prayer:

"Think not thy wisdom can illume away  
The ancient tanglement of night and day;  
Enough: we acknowledge both and both revere,  
He sees not clearliest who sees all things clear."

Revelation, by whatever means, leads us into truth, and all truth is one. But the specific revelation of God in Jewish history and in the person of Christ is not a solvent of all speculative doubts and difficulties, not a thought-saving expedient, not a substitute for science, nor a moderator of its discoveries; it is unconcerned with the date of creation and the origin of species. Discrepancies in dates or as to the names of reigning monarchs in the Books of Kings and Chronicles affect

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxxvi. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. xl. 4.

it not at all. Revelation is the education of the human race in God, and as such it is enough that it should come to us with sufficient light to guide our steps, to lighten our paths.

Habakkuk then seeks for his answer in meditation and prayer. The actual metaphor chosen to express that process will, I think, repay a somewhat closer study. "I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth." These words suggest two distinct thoughts. He goes, for his meditation, to a high, strong place; and to one from which he can get a wide, comprehensive view.

First: it is a high, strong place. We have seen that Habakkuk owed his questioning spirit, and so, later, his prophetic understanding, to the teaching which he had absorbed from the great eighth-century Prophets. It is only when men have acquired a certain measure of faith that they begin to feel the greater difficulties; it is only when they have attained to a real grasp of God that the anomalies and inequalities of life begin strongly to press upon their minds and hearts and to stir within them the questioning spirit. The method of Revelation is progressive, and the secret of that progress is expressed by Our Lord in the saying "Unto every one that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away from him."<sup>1</sup> If we use what we have, we are given more; if we neglect it, the original gift becomes atrophied and is lost to us. "Grace for grace,"<sup>2</sup> that is S. John's description of God's methods of dealing with us. For each gift used a new grace comes. Knowledge absorbed opens a road to new understanding. Strength reached leads on to fresh powers. In religion, as in everything else, the recompense of knowledge is more knowledge; the reward of achievement, the power to achieve more. Along the steep path struck out by

<sup>1</sup> S. Luke xix. 26.

<sup>2</sup> S. John i. 16.

the great Isaiah, Habakkuk had already climbed to a lofty conception of God, and it is from this strong position, this high watch-tower of the soul, that he looks out for a further understanding and a further revelation.

Much more, then, must we Christians, when we seek in prayer and meditation to understand the meaning of war and the things of war, remember first and foremost what we already know of the ways of God. We are facing the unknown, the mysterious, the perplexing, and it is a maxim of all sound education that we should proceed from the known to the unknown. To us Christians there has been given a knowledge of God infinitely higher even than that which the great Prophets had secured to Habakkuk. We must not seek to approach our problem free from all presuppositions. We approach it holding fast to our previously acquired knowledge that God in Christ is revealed as Love. Here is the starting-point of our questionings. It is the eminence of our faith, it is our high, strong place, and however puzzled we are, however much in the dark, we must not, in our gropings, lose hold of the conviction that no answer to our difficulties can be true unless it is consistent with the truth to which we have already attained. In Christ God is revealed as Love. This is the watch-tower of our outlook, the rock of vision, truth high and strong, where and where alone we stand firm to look in confidence for whatever truth He yet will have us learn.

“ I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will look forth.” The spot which Habakkuk selects for his meditation and prayer is a high, strong place, but it is also one from which he can get a wide comprehensive view. His task was to understand and to interpret the ways of the Infinite God, and that is our task too, but it is obviously one which is beyond the power of the human finite mind. It is lack of imagination, as well as irreverence, to expect to be able to see and comprehend it all. But if we are to understand

anything of His ways, we must seek to obtain as wide a view as is possible. The moral and, indeed, the theological problem, which the sufferings of war bring before even the dullest and most limited imagination, does not differ in kind from that which is presented by the spectacle of one little child crushed in a street accident at home. The apparently indiscriminate tragedies of the battle-field must not be faced as unique or isolated facts. They must be looked at in their true setting, not as new problems, but as part of the age-long difficulty of sin and pain and inequality. If we are to interpret aright the meaning of the war, we must not let the immediate pressing tragedy of the moment confine our vision within too narrow limits, but like Habakkuk, mount the high tower whence, with a truer sense of proportion, we can gaze across a wider view of God's dealings with the world.

To Habakkuk at prayer the answer came. His Gospel of Hope, his assured message is to be found in the reading of history which occupies most of this chapter and in the majestic hymn with which the book closes. That message we shall have to consider in the two following addresses. Here it will be well to look at the second verse of the chapter and to notice the stage which it marks in the development of Habakkuk, in the making of a Prophet.

"And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." That Habakkuk feels himself to have reached here his essential message, is shown, I think, by the fact that he feels himself bidden to write it, to make it plain upon his tablets. He is to write it, partly because of its intrinsic importance, partly because, as we shall see, it is an answer, an interpretation which cannot at the moment be verified. God is slowly working His purpose out, and His Prophet is charged to write down his interpretation, to record it in

permanent form, that men may come in time to acknowledge its truth. To the inspired Prophet it is plain and clear already. He sees the end in the beginning; what must be from what is. Others will come but gradually to recognize it. The fact that he feels himself impelled to write some permanent record of what follows is evidence that he has reached here the heart of his message, and the formula with which he begins points even more strongly in the same direction. "The Lord answered me, and said." There is no more uncertainty, no longer any puzzled bewilderment. For the first time he makes use of a formula which you will find in all the Prophetic books. The Prophets differ from one another, in style, in tone, in subject matter and indeed in almost every way. Some are practical statesmen; some are dreaming visionaries; some are unknown peasants; others are at ease in the courts of kings. But all alike, statesmen, poets, peasants, dreamers, all have this in common, that they speak with authority. They all make use of the same authoritative introduction to their message. In the other prophetic books you will meet with some such formula at the very outset; the following quotations are all from the first verse of the first chapter of the different books. "The word of the Lord that came unto Hosea." "The word of the Lord that came to Joel." "Thus saith the Lord concerning Edom."<sup>1</sup> "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah." "The word of the Lord that came to Micah . . . which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem." "The burden of Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum." "The word of the Lord which came unto Zephaniah." "In the second year of Darius the King . . . came the word of the Lord by Haggai the Prophet." "In the eighth month, in the second year . . . came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah." "The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Mala-

<sup>1</sup> Obad. i.

chi." "Thus saith the Lord" is the prelude to each separate section in the first two chapters of Amos. So also in the three great Prophets. Isaiah i. 2: "The Lord hath spoken." Jeremiah i. 2: "Jeremiah, to whom the word of the Lord came." Ezekiel i. 3: "The word of the Lord came expressly unto Ezekiel . . . and the hand of the Lord was there upon him."

I have given a quotation from every one of the Prophets<sup>1</sup> in order to show conclusively that some such formula was the recognized mark of a Prophet; its use constitutes his claim to be heard and to be believed. Habakkuk differs from the others, in that he allows us to see him on the way to becoming a prophet, to follow his anxiety of bewilderment and doubt. We have seen him in penitence, in open-eyed contemplation of the danger, in critical questioning mood, in prayer upon his watch. And now, at last, through these various stages, we see him emerging with the steadfastness from which the other writers start; now at last he speaks with certainty and for the first time makes use of the authoritative prophetic formula: "The Lord answered me, and said."

We have seen, for our own guidance, the stages through which a doubting puzzled man became an assured Prophet. We have watched a Prophet in the making, we see now a Prophet made. For us, as for Habakkuk, questionings, perplexities, bewilderment may be stages in the making of a Prophet. From out this time of trouble and of darkness we, who have drunk of the spirit of the Prophetic Christ, may yet emerge with a strengthened faith, a surer and more helpful message, a vision plain "that he may run that readeth it."

<sup>1</sup> The list above includes a quotation from every single one of the Prophets. Daniel is not really an exception, for though he is sometimes called a Prophet, his book was not included by the Jews in the prophetic canon.

## VI

### HABAKKUK'S GOSPEL OF HOPE

#### I. THE VINDICATION OF GOD IN HISTORY

"Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it."—Hab. ii. 19.

WE have watched a Prophet in the making. Our main purpose, hitherto, has been to trace the steps and stages by which he came to understand. Only incidentally, here and there, have we been able to gather his message. I have, however, thought it worth while to devote most of our attention to Habakkuk's growth and development. He was not less bewildered than we are, and he became an assured Prophet. His methods, therefore, ought to be of real help to us in our Christian duty of trying to understand and to interpret for a sad and questioning world the divine meaning of the tragic events in the midst of which we live.

It will not be necessary to attempt anything in the nature of a full summary of the stages through which Habakkuk passed on his way to becoming a Prophet. It will be sufficient here just to give the bare headings of the previous addresses. Habakkuk became a Prophet: because in humility and penitence he faced first the sins of his own people; because he thought intelligently about the strength of the enemy and contemplated open-eyed the greatness of the danger; because he did not merely acquiesce but boldly questioned the meaning of it all; because he sought his answer from God in prayer upon his tower—height and strength and vision.



The remainder of the book is his prophetic message; his gospel of hope; his answer to the problems which the imminence of war was pressing upon his mind and heart, those same problems which are afflicting us to-day. It is the message which, as we saw in the previous address, he has felt himself impelled to write down, to record in permanent form. The first half of it is contained in the rest of Chapter II, which is Habakkuk's reading of history, in which, in spite of immediate appearance, he sees the certain decadence of evil, the assured vitality of good. The full vindication of God, is not yet: it lies in the future; it "is yet for the appointed time"; but it is assured, "it shall not lie" (ii. 3). Habakkuk has no doubts now. The vindication may seem long in coming; but "though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not delay"; it is certain; it will not delay beyond the appointed time. Habakkuk's hope is in the future.

It is worth noting here that, in this habit of looking forward, the Old Testament is unique among the religious books of the ancient world, indeed it seems a deep-rooted instinct of the human mind to look backwards for perfection. The Classical Poets dreamed of a golden age in the remote past. The Bible writers look always for their golden age in the future: the Kingdom of God and of His Christ; the kingdom that is yet to be. The whole Old Testament is one great forward-looking prediction. The Law with its symbolic sacrifices, the Prophets with their hopes of redemption, the history with its unfulfilled expectations, are all different but converging lines which meet and find their explanation and fulfilment in Jesus, the Christ, Immanuel; the Jewish Messiah who is the Saviour of the World; the man Jesus who is Himself the Eternal God. The Golden Age of the Old Testament is always in the future; the idealization of the Garden of Eden, so popular in a certain type of religious book, is absolutely

unbiblical; an unfortunate heritage from Milton. It comes from "Paradise Lost," not from the Old Testament itself. The Bible is a progressive book, a book of development, its hopes are in the future, it never idealizes the past. Our Lord Himself, the fulfilment of the Old Testament, was also the starting-point of a new creation, a new order. He, too, is always pointing forwards. He valued the wisdom of the past, for He came not to destroy but to fulfil. He built upon old foundations. His Church is the new Israel, the organic development of the old Israel, the people of God; but always where there is life, there must be progress, and so He did not leave His Church a rigid institution, but endowed it with the living presence of His spirit, that it might be adventurous, launching out into the deep, seeking to meet the new needs of each new age; gilding no past, nor expecting perfection in the present, but ever crying, "Thy Kingdom come."

In the present and in the immediate future Habakkuk sees the triumph of the oppressor, but with his eyes upon the vision for the appointed time, the vision which "will surely come," he is calm and unafraid. He sees that it is the self-sufficiency and pride of the Chaldeans which most alienates them from God. "Behold, his soul is puffed up, it is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith" (ii. 4). However seemingly the proud may prosper, the true principle of life is with the just. "The just shall live by his faith." The word does not carry the full New Testament meaning of "faith"; it is perhaps better translated "faithfulness"—the moral steadiness which endures and persists. The Prophet next goes on to show how the characteristics of evil have in them all the seeds of their own self-destruction. Pride is put first, "his soul is puffed up"; therefore, in applying what follows, let us be warned not to think only of our enemies.

The text of verse 5 is obviously corrupt, but it

seems to be a woe denounced upon lustfulness and drunkenness which of their very nature cannot be satisfied; it is true of nations as well as of individuals, that appetite grows by what it feeds on. "He gathereth unto him all nations and heapeth unto him all peoples" (ii. 5). Assyria, Syria, North Israel, Egypt had fallen before the military might of Babylon, but "Shall not all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, Woe to him that increaseth that which is not his! how long? . . . Shall they not rise up suddenly that shall bite thee . . . and thou shalt be for booties unto them? Because thou hast spoiled many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall spoil thee; because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to the city and all that dwelt therein" (ii. 6-8). The nemesis of the Chaldæans came when their Empire, in its turn, fell before the Medes and Persians, whose success was very largely due to the fact that the subject peoples of Babylon had never been conciliated. Therein is one test of the right of a people to the stewardship of Empire. Can they make contented the countries which they have conquered?

"Woe to him that getteth an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the hand of evil" (ii. 9). The Empire of Babylon had risen to great magnificence. It seemed unassailable. Its "nest was set on high." But not in such outward glory is deliverance, if the soul of the people is not right with God. "What shall it profit a man"—or a nation either—"if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

"Thou hast consulted shame to thy house, by cutting off many peoples, and hast sinned against thy soul" (ii. 10). Imperial growth based purely upon force is not merely a sin against the oppressed peoples, it is a sin against the soul of the conquering nation itself.

“ For the stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it ” (ii. 11). In the ancient world conquered people were often deported wholesale to the territories of the victors. So, in the time of Moses, enslaved Jews cried out from the walls of oppressing Egypt. So, in the days of the greatness of Assyria and Babylon, the transplanted timber of exiled peoples re-echoed the protest. So, too, to-day the Slav stones in the wall of Austria cry out to their brethren in Serbia and in Russia; and French and Polish beams forcibly retained in the structure of the German Empire shall answer them. Or, to apply the metaphors more literally, often in the history of the world, conquerors have robbed the vanquished peoples of their art treasures. So the golden vessels of the Lord's house in Jerusalem were carried away to Babylon or Persia. So Napoleon decked Paris with the spoils of Italy. So the treasures of the Summer Palace were stolen by the conquering Westerners. But art, thus transplanted by force, is always incongruous, and the theft leaves behind it a rankling sense of injustice, a burning desire for revenge. The very stones cry out in protest.

Verses 12-14 describe the true and the false conception of greatness. “ Woe to him that buildeth a town with blood, and stablisheth a city by iniquity ” (ii. 12). The exaction of heavy indemnities—or, to use the Bismarckian phrase, the “ Bleeding white ” of a conquered country—may bring temporary wealth to the victors, but it is all in vain; wealth thus acquired, greatness so secured, cannot last. “ Behold it is not of the Lord of Hosts that the peoples labour for the fire, and the nations weary themselves for vanity ” (ii. 13). Greatness is not here, but in steadfast following of God's ways. “ For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea ” (ii. 14). To know God and to obey Him, herein is man's true greatness, his lasting wealth; or as Micah,

in what is perhaps the supreme utterance of Jewish prophecy, expresses it, "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"<sup>1</sup>

Verses 15-17 are exceedingly obscure, but the balance of the sentences, and the similarity between the crimes and their punishments, seem to bring out the essential self-destructiveness of tyranny. In the ancient world, military Empire succeeded to military Empire. As Assyria fell before the might of Babylon, so Babylon, in her turn, succumbed to Persia. In Rome, the Emperors one after another fell before military conspiracies, similar to those by which they had themselves secured the purple. Under the French Revolution, the different governments and Committees of Public Safety followed each other in bewildering succession, as each overwhelmed its no longer tolerable predecessor. Terror breeds terror. Tyranny is avenged by tyranny. Its destruction is not so much a punishment arbitrarily imposed, as the inevitable, self-acting consequence inherent in the sin itself.

Such is Habakkuk's interpretation of militarism and of the worship of power; and the end of it all? It is all idolatry, the following of a false ideal. The worship of power is the worship of a man-made image which cannot help on the true life of man at all. "What profiteth the graven image, that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and the teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols? Woe unto him that saith to the wood, Awake; to the dumb stone, Arise! Shall this teach?" (ii. 18, 19). It may look impressive and magnificent. "Behold it is laid over with gold and silver"; but there is in it no real life, nor power to give life, "there is no breath at all in the midst of it." It is a fraud;

<sup>1</sup> Mic. vi. 8.

a sham; a delusion. Only in standing faithfully by the Lord shall man find abiding strength.

Such, in outline, is Habakkuk's conception of history. Nations, devoted to the worship of power, organized without regard for the will of God, will have great success: but the false ideal carries with it the seeds of its own destruction. The triumph of truth may be but slow. God's vindication tarries, but "though it tarry . . . it will surely come, it will not delay" beyond the appointed time. Wine and lust pall. The desire for possession can never be satisfied. But God's gifts increase in value. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you."<sup>1</sup> Forceful conquest, whether in war or industry, affords no ground for lasting greatness or enduring happiness. "Who overcomes by force has overcome but half his foe."<sup>2</sup> Success, won by injustice, is, in the long run, more disastrous to the spoiler than to the spoiled. The unreconciled remain in lasting protest. Magnificence established by force, and built upon oppression is vanity and as stubble for the burning. The future is assured; for, however far off it be, the time shall come when in all the earth the knowledge of the Lord shall be both wide and deep, "as the waters cover the sea." Contemptuous cruelty prepares its own retribution. A nation which worships power may impress the world by its outward show, its glory as of gold and silver, but there is no life in it at all.

Such is the first part of Habakkuk's gospel of hope. Oppressed by the tragedy of the present, the growing power of the Chaldæans, he has taken a longer view, and in the slow processes of history he sees the handiwork of God, the inevitable decadence of evil, the assured vitality of good.

<sup>1</sup> S. John xiv. 27.

<sup>2</sup> Milton.

## VII

### HABAKKUK'S GOSPEL OF HOPE

#### 2. THE REVEALED CHARACTER OF GOD

"Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation."—Hab. iii. 18.

THE Prophet has studied history, and has found therein God's handiwork. The vision is sure, but it is slow in unfolding itself, "it tarries"; and so he is not yet satisfied. He has seen God's handiwork, but he wants—God. Let us consider the construction of the third Chapter, in which he seeks for God Himself. It is called "A prayer of Habakkuk the Prophet, set to Shigionoth" (iii. 1). (The translation of the word Shigionoth is uncertain, but it is evidently a musical term.) The chapter is called a prayer, but the actual prayer is only in the second verse. "O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and am afraid: O Lord, revive thy work in the midst of the years, In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy" (iii. 2). The previous chapter has ended on a note of reverence, and as he turns away from the traces of God's handiwork in the events of history and seeks to draw nearer to God Himself, his awe deepens. "O Lord, I have heard the report of thee, and am afraid." Fear is an essential of true religion, not, of course, timidity or cowardice, but utter self-abasing reverence. As Moses put off his shoes at the revelation of the great "I AM"; as Isaiah cried out his own unworthiness before the vision

of the Lord high and lifted up; as Habakkuk heard and was afraid, heard and trembled in his place; as the seer of Patmos fell as one dead at the feet of Him whose eyes were as a flame of fire and whose "countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength;" even so we, when we adore the revealed majesty of Incarnate Love, must approach with utter reverence: "The Lord is in his holy temple, let all the earth keep silence before him" (ii. 20).

Habakkuk kneels in silence, and yet he prays that the revelation of God may come to him as it came in past days. "O Lord, revive thy work." Which of us would not wish that, if it were possible, He should come again here visible to us to-day, as once He came in Galilee? "O Lord, revive thy work," make living to us the revelation of the past. Revive it now "in the midst of the years." We have seen the close similarity in many things between Habakkuk's time and our own, but these words indicate one real difference. Habakkuk writes in the grey days, the middle time, when nothing seems to happen; in the dull depressing days of reaction after the failure of Josiah's reformation, half-way between the Assyrian wars and the rise of Babylon. It is a middle time, unstimulating, uninspiring. The people have not yet seen the advancing danger; to them it is the dull uneventful time, but over and beyond the quiet, the Prophet, with his deeper insight, sees the brooding wrath of God, and so he prays: "In the midst of the years make it known; In wrath remember mercy."

The answer to Habakkuk's prayer comes in a vision of the Holy One. It is expressed in the imagery of the Exodus and of thunder. It is a vision of power rather than of love. It represents a conception of God which is current in the earlier Jewish literature, rather than that in the Gospels. The Exodus from Egypt loomed very large in the imagination of the Jewish



people. Psalm and Prophecy reflect its influence. It is the God of Sinai who came "from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran." As of Olympian Jove, lightning and the thunderbolt are his ministers. "His glory covereth the heavens, And the earth was full of his praise" (iii. 3). "And his brightness was as the light; He had rays coming forth from his hand: and there was the hiding of his power" (iii. 4). Disease and plague are at his command. "Before him went the pestilence. And fiery bolts (the hot coals of fever) went forth at his feet" (iii. 5). Nature is powerless before him, Israel's foes powerless. "He stood, and measured the earth; He beheld, and drove asunder the nations: And the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills did bow; His goings were as of old. I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble" (iii. 6, 7). And so the great description of God's going forth for the salvation of his people continues, but it must be read, not analysed, for it is living poetry which cannot be dissected.

In verse 2, Habakkuk asked for a revelation. The splendour of language and of descriptive imagery in verses 3-15 convey the answer for which he prayed.

What, then, is the form of the Prophet's answer to man's perplexities? How reads he the riddle of the universe? The fullest, the best, the all-sufficient answer is found in the revelation of the character of God. That revelation is granted, here a little, there a little, at sundry times and in divers manners, and not least in the happenings of history. In history God is His own interpreter. His vindication will surely come; it will not lie; but often it tarrieth. You can have no true interpretation of history except you study it in long lengths. If you look at history in separate compartments, there is much that it is impossible to understand. The eyes must be lifted up; the field must be

regarded in long perspective ; short vision is often false vision. It is the wide and big view of the world process, the sight of the workings of God among the long events of nations, that has convinced Habakkuk of the justice of God's way. But still he is not satisfied. He wants, as we want, a gospel for each as well as a gospel for all, strength for to-day as well as a message for the future. What help is it to a bereaved widow to tell her how in the long run history shows that the sacrifice of its manhood profits the nation which can call it forth? You will not comfort a waiting mother wracked with torturing anxiety if you talk to her of age-long processes. Standing by the ward door of a hospital, listening to the low sad moaning which comes from where some one's nearest and dearest lies half-way between life and death, who would dare to speak in general phrases about the inevitable self-destruction of evil and the assured vitality of good?

Our God is the God of all. He is the maker of " heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is." But He is also the God of each; the God who loves each single one of His children; the God by whom the very hairs of our head are numbered.

The student of history thinks in millions, but the revelation of the character of God is a help to those who think only in ones. Again, in the events of history, it is only in long perspective that the justice of God's ways is vindicated. Our God is the Eternal God of all the earth, who is slowly working His purpose out. But He is also revealed as our daily guide, our ever-present help in trouble, and it is this revelation which can give strength in the agony of to-day. Habakkuk's hope is based entirely on his vision of what God is. Because God is what in the care of His chosen people He has revealed Himself to be, therefore, whatever may befall him in the present he is able to rejoice. " For though the fig tree shall not blossom, Neither shall

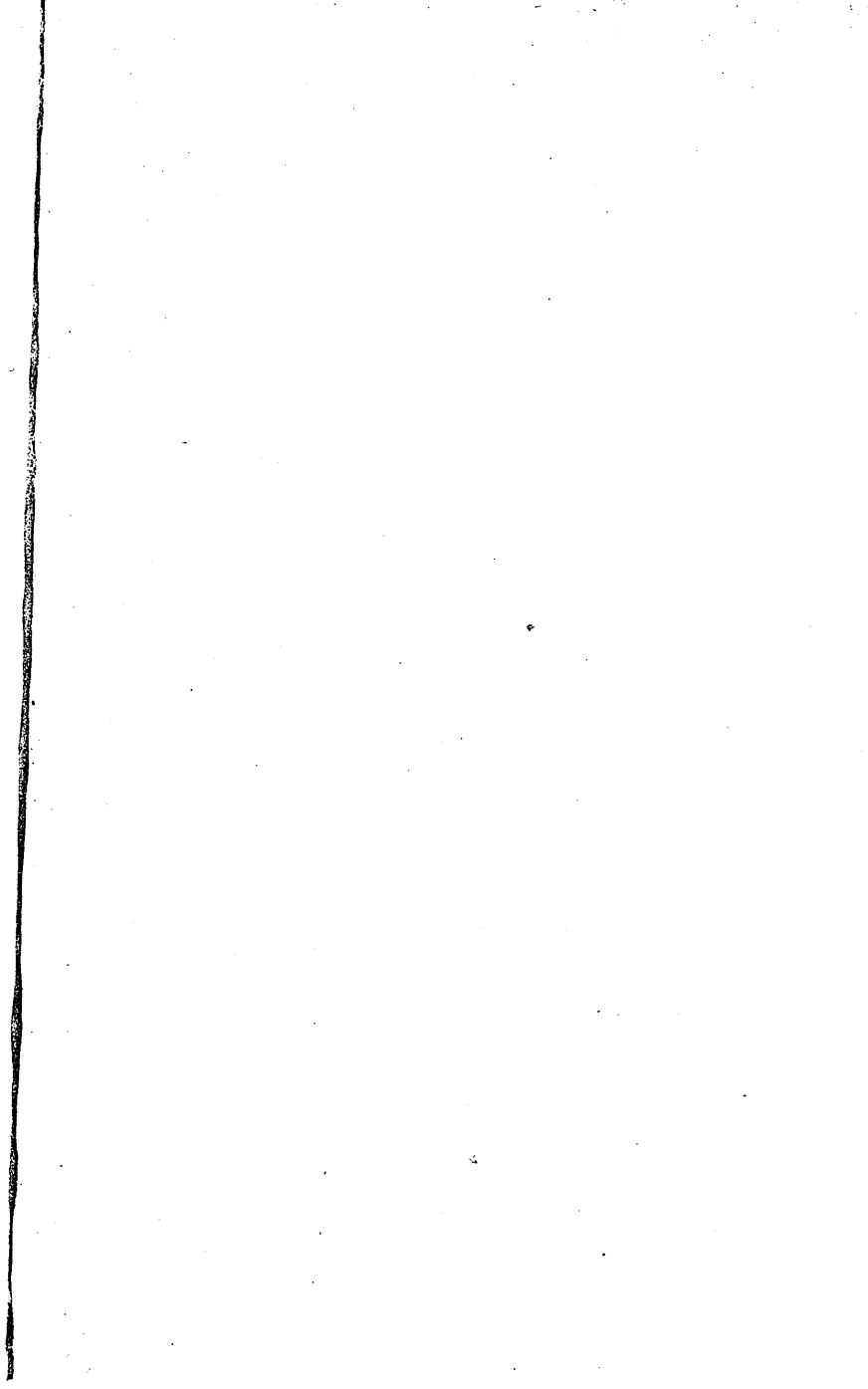
fruit be in the vines; The labour of the olive shall fail, And the fields shall yield no meat; The flock shall be cut off from the fold, And there shall be no herd in the stalls" (iii. 17). This verse describes what would be ruin and desolation to a pastoral people, yet come what may of poverty or disaster "I will rejoice in the Lord." There is a splendid buoyancy in these last two verses. "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. Jehovah, the Lord, is my strength, and he maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and will make me to walk upon mine high places" (iii. 18, 19). This is no passive fatalism. There is nothing of the vice of resignation which so often masquerades as a Christian virtue. There is, in Habakkuk, no humble submission to God's will after it has become certain that he cannot have his own. The facts of disaster contemplated in verse 17 make for depression. The Prophet's religion does not make him dully resigned to disastrous facts. It presents him with another fact, the revealed character of God; and it is this which constitutes his true gospel of hope, the real foundation of his joy, this which, in spite of everything, enables him to end his book on the note of triumph, "Yet I will rejoice in the Lord."

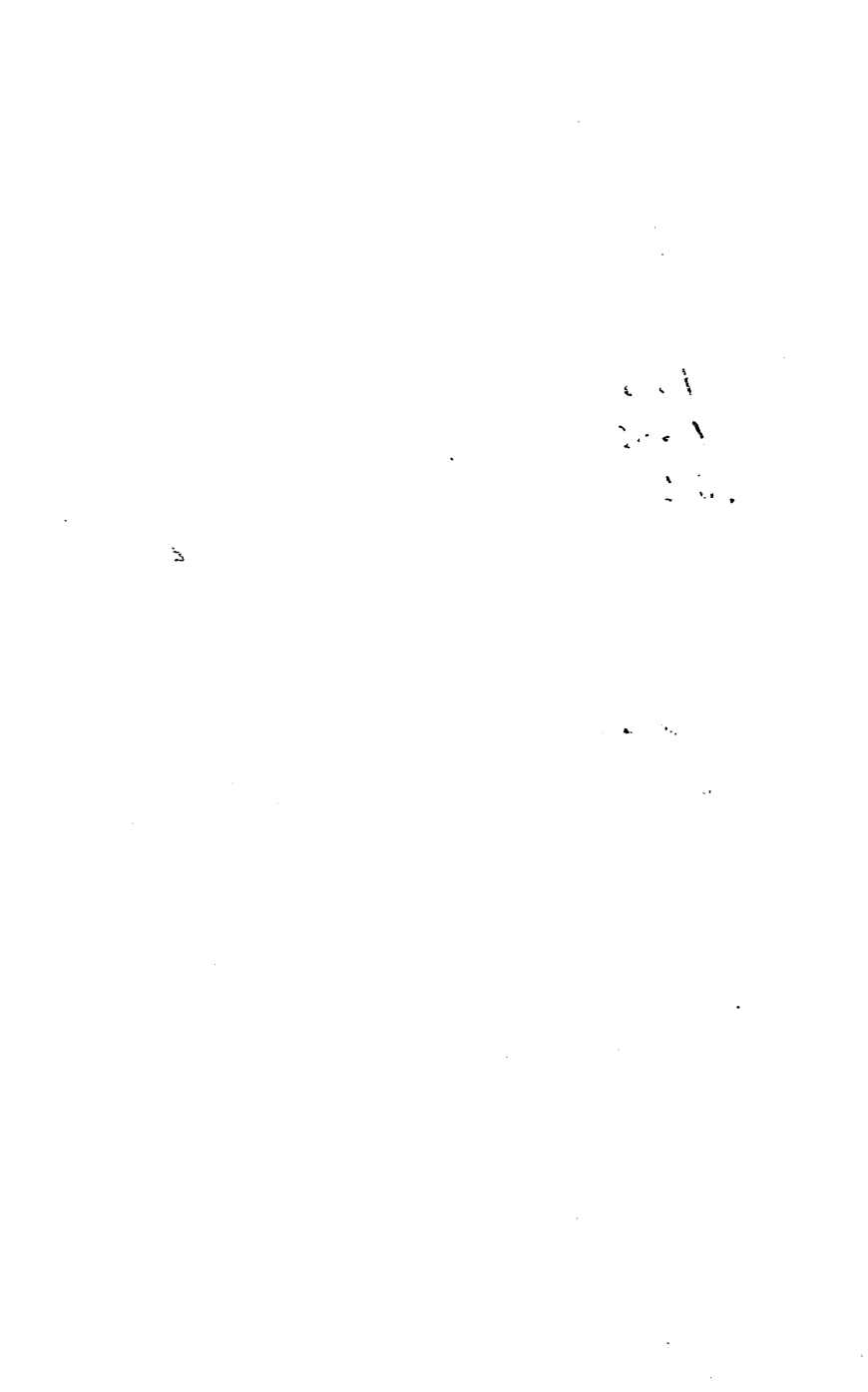
Like Habakkuk's, our gospel of hope to-day must be strong enough to survive the most crushing blows. It must take account of all the facts; the maimed bodies and the young lives cut short; the countless shadowed homes; the huge suffering which stretches from Belgium to far Armenia and which is re-echoed from every country of the world. But joy, which is truly Christian joy, does not blind itself to suffering; its highest expression, its supreme Eucharist, is the service which at the same time commemorates the world's deepest tragedy. And so it will not turn away from the sorrow of our time; it will let us feel our own bereavements and our loss; it will let us enter with fullest

sympathy into the sufferings of our friends; it will not make us callous, nor require of us an unnatural stoicism. It will not ignore the facts of sorrow and of suffering, but, over against them, it will set another fact, the revealed character of God. It is the same gospel, but it will not be couched in the same form or language. Its imagery and its setting will be very different. It will not record the destruction of Jehovah's enemies, "the tents of Cushan in affliction"; it will not dwell overmuch on his power revealed in the terror of the thunder, of the eternal mountains scattered, or the everlasting hills that bow, but it will rest on the fuller revelation of God's character which has been given us in Christ. If Habakkuk's knowledge of God enabled him to end his book on a note of triumph, then surely our greater knowledge should help us to stand upright before even the worst calamities.

Because God is what in the Incarnation, the Passion and the Resurrection He has revealed Himself to be, therefore come what may of bereavement, tragedy and loss, yet "I will rejoice in the Lord." The God whom it is so hard to understand to-day is the same God who came down in love at Christmas, the same who Himself suffered on the Cross, who rose in the perfection of His Manhood on that first Easter morning: "Jesus Christ the same yesterday, to-day and for ever;" therefore, "I will joy in the God of my salvation." The God of all. The God of each. Our God. My God. "The Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me." He has not changed.

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